

MOSES,

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE,

CONDUCTING

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

FROM

EGYPT TO THE PROMISED LAND;

A PRIZE POEM,

RECITED IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

JUNE 10, 1807.

OXFORD:

PRINTED FOR J. PARKER ;

F. AND C. RIVINGTON, AND LONGMAN, HURST,

REES, AND ORME, LONDON.

MDCCCVII.

S. Collingwood, Printer, Oxford.

MOSES,

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

CONDUCTING

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

FROM

EGYPT TO THE PROMISED LAND;

A PRIZE POEM,

RECITED IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCCVII.

M O S E S

CONDUCTING

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, &c.

OH for that spirit which on Moses' lyre
Pour'd from the fount of light celestial fire,
Or which, 'mid Sion's courts, in later day,
Rais'd to sublime the Monarch-Prophet's lay !
For high the theme these numbers would rehearse,
High as e'er blest the happier Sons of Verse !
A nation fetter'd, from a tyrant land
Snatch'd by an arm outstretch'd, and mighty hand,
Through pathless wilds by signs and wonders led,
While swept twice twenty summers o'er its head,

And taught at length to rear its infant throne
In distant lands and regions not its own.

And ask of days that were from elder time,
Ask of yon orb which visits every clime,
If e'er they heard, since first they roll'd along,
A theme so worthy of an Angel's song !

Great was the shout from glad Arabia's shore,
" Sunk is Nile's warrior pride to rise no more !"
Sublime the triumph swells: to him, the Lord,
The God of Battles, wakes each tuneful chord ;
'Their full applause the deep-mouth'd clarions raise,
And virgin timbrels join their softer praise :
From thousand altars holy perfumes rise,
And myriads bow in one vast sacrifice.

Are these the tribes which late by ^a Sihor's tide
Wept o'er their wrongs, and loud for vengeance
cried ?

^a Another name for the Nile.

For them Hope beam'd not ; but a night profound,
An endless night, seem'd gath'ring fast around ;
Yet did the Day-spring rise, the captive's groan
Went not unheeded to his Father's throne ;
He heard the mother's shriek, in anguish wild,
Ask from the tyrant's hand her murder'd child ^b;
He saw the toiling slave, th' inhuman lord,
And the keen tortures of the knotted cord.
Thrice-favoured race ! Jehovah's parent eye
Mark'd ev'ry tear, and number'd ev'ry sigh !
And though full many a dreary age had shed
Slav'ry's worst woes upon th' unshelter'd head,
Though dark and long the night, yet morn could
bring
Joy in its eye, and healing on its wing.

^b Alluding to Pharaoh's edict for the destruction of all the male children.

‘ And lo! he comes, the Seer, whom Greece would
claim

Her Guardian-Pow’r by many a fabled name ;
Meekest of men, by God’s own voice decreed
His chosen flock, with shepherd care, to lead ;
For this was Mercy’s arm outstretch’d to save
His infant promise from an early grave,
When Nile’s tam’d billow kiss’d his ruddy bed,
And the green snake play’d harmless o’er his head :
For this, when Science taught his wond’ring view
To read the stars, and look all nature through ;
When Wealth and Honour led his Youth along,
And Pleasure woo’d him with her Siren song ;
For this (as warm’d he felt his spirit rise,
And kindling claim its high-born destinies,)

‘ Huet has given a list of the different Deities supposed to be
the same with Moses.

For this he spurn'd them all ; and now his hand
Sheds pale dismay on Egypt's trembling land,
And waves exulting the triumphant Rod,
Israel's release and symbol of his God.

'Tis past—that hour of death ! the eye of light
On its own tow'rs looks down, in glory bright :
Yet ne'er on host so vast its golden beam,
Waking, hath shone, as now, with mighty stream
Of mingled man and herd, from Goshen's land
Pours frequent forth, a more than locust band.

They go ; but all is silent as the tomb—
For look ! where, column'd high in massy gloom,
Deep as the darkness of the coming storm,
Moves slow before the host a giant-form ;
And see, as all the twilight landscape fades,
A pale and dubious light the mass pervades,

^d Heliopolis.

And, as the night rolls on, the wondrous frame
Pours a broad glare, and brightens into flame ;
'Tis not the beacon-fire, which wakes from far
The wand'ring fons of rapine and of war :
'Tis not of night's fair lamp the silv'ry beam,
Nor the quick darting meteor's angry gleam ;
No ! 'tis the pillar'd cloud, " the torch of Heav'n,"
Pledge of the present God, by Mercy giv'n ;
'The sacred boon, by Providence supplied,
By day to cover, and by night to guide.

And He the great, th' eternal Lord, whose might
All being owns, who spake, and there was light,
Who gave the Sun the tow'r of day to keep,
And the pale Moon to watch o'er nature's sleep,
He, present still, shall aid, shall safety yield,
Thy lamp by night, by day thy guide and shield.

Not such their trust, when by the Red Sea flood,
Trembling and faint, th' affrighted myriads stood ;

When War foam'd fierce behind, and from the wave
Despair dark frowning yell'd, "Behold thy grave:"
When, spurr'd to insult rude, th' impatient crowd
Chid the meek man of God, and murmur'd loud:
"Was it for this, that Nile's obedient flood
Roll'd, at thy word, a sea of death and blood?
"For this, to life did every sand-grain spring,
"And Famine lurk beneath the insect's wing?
"Was it for this, the Sun forgot to rise,
"And midnight darkness veil'd the noonday skies?
"Or when, high-borne upon the sweeping blast,
"Th' avenging Spirit of Destruction pass'd,
"And dealt, with viewless arm, that mortal blow,
"Which laid the blooming hopes of Egypt low;
"Was it for this, the frowning Seraph staid
"The fiery vengeance of his deathful blade;
"Bent on the hallow'd blood his alter'd eye,
"Own'd Mercy's pledge, and pass'd innocuous by;

“ And spar’d us, but to glut the savage sword,
“ Or groan once more beneath a tyrant lord ?”

Peace, impious doubts ! rebellious murmurs, hence !
Mark the rais’d wand, and trust Omnipotence !—

’Tis done ! obedient to the high decree

Wave parts from wave, and sea rolls back from sea ;

Till, sudden check’d as by the wintry hand

Of the stern North, the solid waters stand.

The pillar’d flames, while gathering darkness falls,

Shed passing radiance on the crystal walls ;

And now those caves, where dwelt primeval Night,

Drink the warm spirit of the orient light ;

Swift through th’ abyss the pure effulgence flies,

And earth’s foundations burst on human eyes.

But see ! where Egypt comes ! with speed and car,

And thousands, panting for the spoils of war ;

Bold waves her plume, and proud her banners gleam,

As now they bask’d in Victory’s golden beam ;

The war-trump speaks ; madd'ning she spurns the
shores,

And through the yawning furges headlong pours.

But where is Egypt now ? Where all her might,
Her steeds, her cars, her thousands arm'd for fight ?

Where is the banner'd pride that wav'd so high ?

And where the trump that told of victory ?

All, all are past ; the chain'd and fetter'd deep,

Loos'd from its bonds, at one tremendous sweep

Whelm'd all their hopes, and not a wreck is seen

To tell to future times that they had been.—

And thou, infatuate Prince, of stubborn mould,

Aw'd by no terrors, by no pow'r controll'd !

Hast thou too felt that arm thy soul defied ?

How is thy glory fall'n ! how chang'd thy pride !

For Hope had fondly deem'd thy death-cold clay

Should mock Corruption's worm, nor know de-

. cay ;

But ne'er thy scatter'd bones shall now be hid
In the dark bed of thy proud pyramid :
But thou, vain boaster, and thy meanest slave,
Alike must glut the monsters of the wave.

And now, perchance, Redeem'd of Heav'n, for you
Hope paints new lands, in Fancy's fairest hue ;
Of scenes perchance she tells, more heav'nly blest
Than Tempe's vale, or Leuce's fabled rest,
Where vernal flowers 'mid Autumn's fruitage blow,
Where milky streams, and honied waters flow ;
Ah, trust her not ! Yet stay, fond Flatt'rer, stay,
For long and sad shall be the wand'rer's way,
And scarce an eye, that now so brightly beams,
Shall feast on Carmel's palms, or Siloa's streams.
Then once again thy fairy vision give,
Pour warmer tints, bid fresher colours live ;
It must not be ; before the tempest fly
Hope's rainbow hues, and darkness shrouds the sky.

What now avail their days, with wonders blest,
Th' unwasting fandal and unchanging vest ?
What boots it now, that Morn's ambrosial dews
Uneloying sweets, angelic food diffuse ?
That balmy Eve, upon her dusky wings,
A feather'd cloud, a heav'n-sent banquet brings ?
For, faint and feeble, on Rephidim's plain,
Lies, like a feather'd fold, the sinking train ;
While the flush'd cheek and panting breast proclaim
That fierce within them burns the thirsty flame.
Around in vain they cast th' imploring eye,—
'Tis all one waste of sand, one blaze of sky !
Oh how their souls for Marah's waters yearn,
And ask the bitter draught they late could spurn !
But past are Marah's streams, and far away
O'er Elim's wells the verdant palm-trees play :
No more their hearts are cheer'd by Freedom's smile,
But many a warm sigh speeds, to where the Nile

Rolls its cool waves through bow'r or fertile plain,
And Life seems lovely, though it wear a chain.

But must they die ? Will He, their Guardian Pow'r,
Forlake them in affliction's darkest hour ?

No ! He their pray'r hath heard ; at His command,
The mighty leader lifts the sov'reign wand ;

Astonish'd Horeb feels, at ev'ry pore,
Strange waters gush, and springs unknown before ;
Swift o'er the sands the new-born currents glide,
And breezes freshen round the rolling tide.

In sudden terror fix'd, and mute amaze,
Doubting awhile, th' exhausted myriads gaze ;
Then bursts their rapture forth ; and young and old,
Crowd over crowd, like gathering surges, roll'd,
Press to the stream, and send to Heav'n a cry
Of high-rais'd joy, of grateful ecstacy.

And did thy sons, with more than filial care,
Their Father's love in holiest mem'ry bear ?

And did no foul revolt, no deep-dy'd crime,
Stain the fair record of succeeding time ?
Ah, witness Thou, whose zeal indignant trod
Prone in the dust the people's idol-god !
Ah, witness Thou, that oft, in folly proud,
Ungrateful Judah spurn'd the faith he vow'd ;
Transgress'd the Law by matchless wisdom plann'd,
And dar'd the wrath of Heav'n's avenging hand,

Not such your promise, false, apostate race,
When pale ye bow'd at Sinai's trembling base ;
Shrunk from the trumpet's blast, and shook with fear
As more than mortal accents met your ear.
Why didst thou tremble, Sinai ? Why were spread
Clouds and thick darkness round thy mystic head ?
Why like a furnace glow'd thy groaning womb,
And shot red volumes through th' investing gloom ?
Let him declare, who in that dread abode,
Tremendous thought ! held converse with his God !

And sure no mortal voice was that, whose sound
Hush'd the big thunders pealing full around ;
No mortal voice was that, whose mighty din
Shook the firm frame, and mov'd the soul within :
No, from yon cloud eternal accents brake,
And He, the God of gods, Jehovah spake ;
Earth, seas, and skies confess'd th' almighty word
Which gave them birth ; which must again be heard,
When, like a vapour, they shall melt away—
Oh glorious morn ! Oh great, terrific day !
Such as hath never been, since first, when Time
Through hynning orbs began his march sublime ;
Nor shall be more, till, wrapt in billowy fire,
Worlds headlong rush, and Nature's self expire.

Yet tho' by God's own voice the Law was giv'n,
Grav'd by His hand, in characters of Heav'n ;
Though Mercy smil'd, though threat'ning Vengeance
frown'd,

Jacob's false sons Jehovah's pow'r disown'd ;
Yet still His eye watch'd o'er them, still He spread
His guardian pinions o'er His people's head,
Still bore them on, till, in triumphal pride,
Their sacred banner wav'd o'er Jordan's tide.

And He, their Priest, their Prophet, and their Chief,
Source of their bliss, and solace of their grief,
Oh must not He through Jordan's reflux wave
Still lead the host, his arm so oft could save ?
Must not those hands, which, heav'nward rais'd, made
wreck

Of the proud hopes of stubborn Amalek ;
Which bow'd pale Bashan's thousands in the fight,
And crush'd th' aspiring crest of Sihon's might,
Must not those hands, with vengeance not their own,
Tear haughty Canaan from his guilty throne ?
No, Meribah forbids ; yet Mercy's pray'r
Smooths the dark frown which Justice seem'd to wear.

From Pisgah's hallow'd height the Seer surveys
Scenes yet to be, and deeds of future days ;
Sees, unassail'd, the firm and solid wall
Bow to the clanging war-trump's sev'nfold call ;
Views federate monarchs, trembling and dismay'd,
Bend to the conquering might of Joshua's blade ;
And kindling marks, in triumph's happiest hour,
Jehovah's banner float from Salem's tow'r.
But, gift diviner far ! his raptur'd eyes
See the true Prophet, the Messiah rise,
View Heav'n reveal'd, and, as from scenes too bright
Retiring, shrink into the shades of night.

Where, boast of Israel, is thy secret tomb^e ?
Did Earth receive thee to her parent womb ?
Did Seraph-hands prepare the viewless pyre ?
Or didst thou mount unchang'd on wings of fire ?

^e Deut. xxxiv. 6. " But no man knoweth of his tomb to
" this day."

For many a tear o'er thee did Israel shed,
And mourn'd thy spirit, as thy cold corse, dead ;
Nor causeless mourn'd, for ne'er their thoughts could
rise

To deathless life, to worlds beyond the skies :
O it was dark with them ; to their weak sight
The future all was wrapt in deepest night ;
Or trembling Hope the distant scene display'd
Dim as the morn's grey dawn, or ev'ning's shade.
But on our view, bright beaming from afar,
Breaks the blest ray of Bethlehem's Morning Star,
While, purg'd from ev'ry film, Faith's angel eye
Mocks Time's thin veil, and scans Eternity.

For Christ, our holier Passover, is slain,
Lamb without spot, and pure from ev'ry stain,
Pledge of that love, whose might resistless broke
Sin's fiercer reign, and Satan's heavier yoke !

And He is present still—He still shall bless
The thorny path of life's rough wilderness.
He still bids springs of living water rise,
And heav'nly food, with ceaseless care, supplies.
And when by Death's cold stream we trembling stand,
The Stream which bars us from our Promis'd Land,
His voice shall calm our fears, His hand shall guide
Our fainting footsteps through that fiercer tide,
And land us safely on our Canaan's shore,
Where Toil, and Tears, and Death are known no
more.

MATTHEW ROLLESTON,

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE.

Lately published,

Price Three Shillings in Boards,

A COLLECTION of OXFORD PRIZE POEMS.

